



Billy Mitchell's War with the Navy: The Army Air Corps and the Challenge to Seapower

Thomas Wildenberg

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In the years following WWI, the U.S. Congress was more interested in disarmament than in funding national defense. For the military services this meant lean budgets and skeleton operating forces. Billy Mitchell's War recounts the struggle between the Army and Navy air arms for the resources needed to define and establish the role of aviation within their respective services in the period between the two world wars. When Billy Mitchell returned from WW I, he brought with him the deep-seated belief that air power had made armies and navies obsolete. When Congress rejected the concept of a unified air service in 1920, Mitchell and his supporters turned on the Navy, seeking to substitute the Air Service as the nation's first line of defense. While Mitchell proved that aircraft could sink a battleship with the bombing of the Ostfriesland in 1921, he was unable to convince the General Staff of the Army, the General Board of the Navy, the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy, or Congress of the need for an independent air force. When Mitchell turned to the pen to discredit the Navy, he was convicted by his own words and actions in a court-martial that captivated the nation, and was forced to resign in 1925. Rather than ending the rivalry for air power, Mitchell's resignation set the stage for the ongoing dispute between the two services in the years immediately before WWII.

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